

Updating Newtown's Plan of Conservation and Development

PUBLIC PLANNING WORKSHOP March 8, 2003

WORKSHOP TOPIC #2

How Do We Preserve Newtown's Rural Character and Natural Environment?

Introduction

The visual character of Newtown's pastoral and rural landscape, including open fields, stonewalls, ponds and streams, country lanes and forested areas makes a valued contribution to Newtown's community character. These elements of Newtown's landscape are altered one lot at a time, as undeveloped land is subdivided and built upon;

The quality of life in Newtown is influenced by the quantity, quality and distribution of natural resources that compose its natural environment. The natural environment defines Newtown's natural landscape and thereby contributes greatly to the visual character of the Town. The protection of Newtown's environment is important to ensuring the quality of life is maintained for present and future generations.

The following summarizes the Issues, Goals and Strategies that have been discussed for these topics:

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

ISSUE #1: Newtown's Pastoral and Rural Landscape

1. The visual character of Newtown's pastoral and rural landscape, including open fields, stonewalls, ponds and streams, country lanes, forested areas, etc., makes a valued contribution to Newtown's Community Character;
2. Newtown's pastoral and rural landscape is altered one lot at a time, as undeveloped land is subdivided and built upon;
3. Some views of Newtown from State highways form lasting images of the Town's natural beauty and contribute to the Town's perceived community character;
4. The points of entry into Newtown from Brookfield, Bethel, Monroe and Southbury, as well as from I-84 interchanges 9, 10 and 11, provide initial impressions of Newtown's Community Character.

Goal *Maintain the scenic characteristics of Newtown’s “Pastoral and Rural Areas,” and “Image Corridors” and enhance the “Gateways” to Newtown.*

Strategies:

1. Residential development fronting on town roads within identified “Pastoral or Rural” areas should be sited so as to create a visual buffer from the public realm;
2. Development occurring within identified “Pastoral and Rural Areas” or visible from identified “Image Corridors” should be encouraged to use “conservation” / “open space” subdivision design;
3. Pursue the use of design standards for the maintenance, upgrading and construction of town roads that contribute to the preservation of the pastoral and rural characteristics of Newtown’s natural landscape and create a public realm that enhances the character of the areas served;
4. Expand the Town’s Scenic Road Program to help preserve the pastoral, rural and scenic characteristics of Newtown’s landscape;
5. Consider utilizing the State’s Scenic Road Program to help protect the scenic qualities of State highways within identified “Image Corridors;”
6. Upgrade development siting and landscaping at Newtown’s “Gateways” to enhance the initial visual impression of the Town;
7. Encourage the elimination of overhead utility lines.

ISSUE #2: Newtown’s Borough and Hamlets

1. The Borough is the historic center of Newtown and contributes significantly to the Town’s community character;
2. Each of Newtown’s four mixed-use hamlets (Botsford, Dodgingtown, Hawleyville and Sandy Hook) contribute in different ways to the character of the surrounding neighborhoods.

Goal: *Preserve the mixed-use functions and enhance the visual appearance of Newtown’s Borough and Hamlets.*

Strategies:

1. Support Borough efforts to pursue the utilization of Village District regulations to coordinate development activities that enhance the appearance of the Borough and improve pedestrian mobility;
2. Support community efforts to revitalize and beautify the historic, mixed-use Sandy Hook hamlet, in a pedestrian friendly manner;
3. Continue the implementation of the adopted plan for Hawleyville;
4. Pursue efforts to protect vacant lands surrounding the Borough and Newtown’s four hamlets so as to preserve the historic settlement pattern of mixed-use villages and hamlets surrounded by open land;

5. Support actions which will enhance the appearance and mixed-use functions of Newtown's hamlets.
6. Create and adopt design guidelines for future development.

ISSUE #3: The Public Realm

1. The quality of the public realm created by town buildings, parks and monuments, strongly influences the perception of Newtown's community character and the sense of community pride;

Goal: *Enhance the public realm's contributions to Newtown's Community Character.*

Strategies:

1. When constructing town owned buildings and upgrading existing town facilities, pursue a siting and design strategy that will enhance the public's perception of Newtown's community character;
2. Integrate new municipal facilities into the fabric of the surrounding neighborhood;
3. Consider the co-location of municipal facilities, such as parks associated with schools or other public buildings, to create community activity centers and provide additional opportunities for community interaction.

CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES

ISSUE #1: Newtown's Wetlands and Water Courses

1. Wetlands function as water storage areas, natural water purification systems, ground water recharge areas and natural habitat areas;
2. Vernal pools are intermittent water courses with wildlife and plant life indigenous to this habitat.

Goal: *Continue to preserve and protect Inland Wetlands and Watercourses from potential sources of contamination or development.*

Strategies:

1. Maintain a regulatory policy of no net loss of wetlands;
2. Consider all regulated wetlands as potential protected open space;
3. Continue the practice of reviewing the impacts of development within 100' of a regulated wetland or watercourse;
4. Require development applications to identify and protect vernal pools as regulated wetlands;
5. Support the enforcement of wetland, soil erosion and sedimentation control regulations by encouraging the adoption of penalties for violation;

6. Where feasible, create a network of buffers and greenways along watercourses that will allow for resource protection and public access.

ISSUE #2: Surface Water and Ground Water Resources

1. Stratified drift aquifers within Newtown represent important existing and potential sources of drinking water;
2. Portions of Newtown's surface water resources do not meet DEP's targeted water quality classification;
3. Stream corridors filter pollutants, while providing riverine habitat and travel corridors for wildlife.

Goal: Achieve and protect high water quality classifications throughout Newtown.

Strategies:

1. Adopt the CT DEP's suggested Water Quality Classifications for Newtown's water resources as a goal of the Plan of Conservation and Development;
2. Continue implementation of the Pootatuck Aquifer Protection Overlay District to protect the drinking water resources contained in the stratified drift deposits of the Pootatuck Aquifer;
3. Consider the creation of additional aquifer protection areas in Newtown to protect the quality of potential drinking water resources for future use;
4. Consider the use of river protection overlay districts to: protect life, public safety and property; protect and improve water quality by filtering pollutants and sediments; stabilize stream banks and river beds; improve aquatic habitat; and provide travel corridors for wildlife;
5. Continue to protect existing and potential water supply aquifers from land uses that pose a risk to the maintenance of high water quality;
6. Support pollution discharge standards that will not allow the degradation of Newtown's water resources;
7. When necessary to ensure the protection of Newtown's groundwater resources, support the expansion of the municipal sewer system;
8. Continue to strengthen storm water management practices that minimize the use of impervious surfaces and encourage on-site infiltration as a means of controlling water run-off and maintaining water quality;
9. Use the protection of open space lands as an additional means of protecting the quality of Newtown's water resources.

ISSUE #3: Flood Hazard Areas

1. Flood hazard areas and floodways are vital elements of the natural storm water management systems in Newtown;
2. Development within flood hazard areas could result in the loss of life and property;
3. Municipal land use policies and regulations can affect the ability of flood hazard areas to effectively and safely accept storm water discharge.

Goal: *Regulate activities within flood hazard areas to protect life and property and preserve natural storm water management functions.*

Strategies:

1. Continue to strengthen municipal regulation of the flood hazard areas identified by the Federal Emergency Management Administration to protect life and property and to maintain effective natural storm water management systems;
2. Maintain flood hazard controls that will assure continued participation in the National Flood Insurance Program;
3. Support actions that limit the use of flood prone areas;
4. Support actions that guard against increased downstream runoff and ensure no net increase in up-stream and down-stream flood elevations;
5. Support actions that protect the effective functioning of natural drainage ways.

ISSUE #4: Newtown's Natural Geologic Features

1. Geologic features create specialized habitat for some plant and animal species;
2. Some geologic features contribute to Newtown's scenic character.

Goal: *Preserve and protect Newtown's unique bedrock geological features.*

Strategy:

1. Discourage development which would destroy bedrock outcroppings.

ISSUE #5: Newtown's Farmland

1. Prime agricultural land is an important natural resource for the local production of food;
2. Lands in agricultural use contribute to the scenic character of Newtown's landscape and provide a link to the Town's agricultural past;
3. Un-protected prime agricultural land will remain under economic pressures to be developed for residential and other non-agricultural uses.

Goal: *Protect prime agricultural land resources and promote agricultural uses.*

Strategies:

1. Promote the utilization of Newtown's Conservation and Agricultural Zone as a means of preserving agricultural businesses, equestrian activities and prime agricultural land resources;
2. Pursue land use policies and regulations which will result in the conservation of prime agricultural land resources;
3. Work with agricultural businesses and land owners to conserve land used for agricultural purposes through the use of conservation easements, the purchase of development rights, open space acquisitions, the use of purchase-lease back agreements designed to help sustain agricultural uses and the utilization of the "490" reduced tax assessment program;
4. Encourage the development of farmers markets.
5. Encourage the development of agri-businesses to help preserve the continued use of land for agricultural purposes.

ISSUE #6: *Newtown's Indigenous Wildlife and Plant Life Natural Resources.*

1. Newtown's varied topography, forested tracts, abundant watercourses, ponds, lakes and wetlands provide habitat that supports a variety of plants and animals;
2. The Connecticut Department of Protection has identified sites in Newtown that contain unique habitats supporting endangered, threatened or special concern species.

Goal: *Conserve and protect natural systems and their functions in order to maintain wildlife and plant life indigenous to Newtown.*

Strategies:

1. Protect wildlife and plant life habitat areas identified as "endangered, threatened, and special concern" by the Connecticut DEP's, Natural Diversity Database;
2. Protect large undisturbed and contiguous blocks of land to sustain diverse wildlife habitat;
3. Identify existing wildlife corridors and support actions that preserve habitat needed for the survival of indigenous wildlife species;
4. Develop a working relationship with Newtown's several fish and game conservation organizations to support actions that preserve habitat needed for the survival of indigenous wildlife species.

ISSUE #7: *Steep Slopes, Ridgelines, Hilltops and Scenic Views in Newtown.*

1. The character of Newtown's natural landscape is defined in part by the presence of areas of steep slopes, prominent ridgelines and hilltops;
2. A number of vantage points in Newtown afford beautiful views of Newtown's countryside.

Goal: *Preserve and protect Newtown's steep slopes, ridgelines and scenic views.*

Strategies:

1. Support actions that will lead to the protection of slopes of 25 percent or greater;
2. Restrict land clearance for development on hilltops and ridgelines and encourage the replanting of trees;
3. Protect the scenic vistas identified in the 1998 Town report titled "The Views of Newtown;"
4. Consider "viewshed" analysis as a requirement of future development applications.